



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Milwaukee County

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2013 Milwaukee County State of the County

REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Thank you Mayor Scaffidi for the introduction.

As we all know, this has been a trying time for the Oak Creek community. Last summer, we lost too many fellow citizens in this quiet community.

There were many heroes that day, the first responders who showed amazing bravery, the members of the Sikh Temple who experienced this horrific act and have become symbols of courage and grace and of course Oak Creek Police Lieutenant Brian Murphy.

I know Lt. Murphy and all the first responders and community members from across the area who stood tall that day in the face of evil would rather not be praised for their heroics but you deserve our thanks. Thank you.

One of the reasons I wanted to come to Oak Creek for the State of the County is not to highlight the shooting but rather to focus on what came next. The events that took place in the hours, days, weeks and months since the terrible shooting shows what Milwaukee County is really all about. Too often the disagreements we have get all the attention, but everyone in this room – regardless of our political parties – have a lot more in common than we have to disagree on. We all want Milwaukee County to be the best it can be.

Most voters don't care if it's a Democratic or Republican idea and they don't care who gets the credit, they just want to see things get done.

As President Obama said last month during his inauguration:

"We cannot mistake absolutism for principle, or substitute spectacle for politics, or treat name-calling as reasoned debate."

I'll never be the orator the President is, so I won't try to top his words other than to say, I will always focus on the substance of the issues and avoid over simplification and accusations. We can and need to do better.

The response to the shooting here in Oak Creek is an example of the power we all hold when we work together and are focused. The heroes across the County that responded that dark day, and the many who worked behind the scenes to comfort and help, demonstrated the best of what government can be.

After the shooting, people didn't ask about political beliefs before offering a helping hand, strangers didn't debate tax policy before giving blood and certainly first responders didn't care about religion before putting their lives in harm's way.

That is the Milwaukee County I'm proud to represent and I know as we look to 2013 and beyond we can make this an even better community.

The key to the services Milwaukee County provides is the employees. I'm fortunate to lead four thousand great employees. I'm proud that I am working with my cabinet to create a culture that recognizes nurtures and lifts up their good work, and I'm proud that in my 2013 budget I was able to avoid furlough days and give raises to our employees.

I can't make promises about what the future might bring, but I want to assure our employees that I remain committed to improving your work environment and treating you with the respect you deserve in the years to come. Part of this effort is working towards greater clarity of policies and procedures for all employees, one of many steps toward improving the services Milwaukee County provides.

There has been a lot of talk lately about the Milwaukee County government and specifically the future of the County Board. The voters asked for a change in 2012, and I concur that the current system is not best serving the constituents. We can do better.

As I have said time and time again, this is not about individual Supervisors or myself; rather, this is about reforming Milwaukee County government to make it work now and for the long-term. There are a number of Supervisors here today and I truly thank you for taking the time to be here. I know many of you don't agree with me on this issue, but I also hope that you can put that aside and work with me on other important issues facing Milwaukee County.

Particularly during this tense time, I appreciate those of you who are willing to continue to work with me to improve Milwaukee County.

One of those important issues is continuing our aggressive effort to reform mental health care in Milwaukee County.

For decades experts and advocates have called for moving away from outdated, institutional care and into a more community-based mental health system. While the dedicated experts working at our mental health complex work tirelessly each and every day, we can improve the system to enable such dedicated professionals to provide the best care.

Milwaukee County is one of the last places in the country to still have these types of institutional mental health hospitals. We need to reform the way we deliver mental health services in Milwaukee County to be in line with best practice models across the country. My 2012 Budget included \$3 million to start that process. We have aggressively laid the groundwork and are now moving into the next phase.

Today I am making a commitment to shift patients in our long term care units at the Behavioral Health Hospital and move them into integrated, community settings within the next 3 years.

We will move as quickly as possible, with our many partners in the community, to create

capacity throughout the community so that people with mental health issues can live close to their families and friends with a person-centered, recovery-oriented approach to their wellness.

This change is not the result of any incident, employee, or concern regarding quality of care. This is about doing the right thing by allowing people with mental illness to live in the least restrictive environment close to their love ones and receive the care they deserve and need.

Study after study shows that people thrive and recover much faster when they are in community, rather than institutional, settings. That is what we must strive for - This is what I am committed to accomplishing

I'm happy to say that the State, mental health advocates, local hospitals and other health care providers have agreed to collaborate with us on this effort. Success depends on this collaboration, and I'm grateful that our many partners are willing to move forward together. I hope the County Board will join us in working positively on these important changes. Together we can make mental health care more accessible and sustainable. Treatment will improve and lives will be changed for the better.

Another big effort we are moving forward on this year is taking a close look at how Milwaukee County uses the buildings and resources we have. I'm glad Supervisor Jursik is here because I know this is an issue she is passionate about.

The County just received the results of an exhaustive study that confirms the direction we have been going since I took office. The study shows we need to make significant changes in our approach to County buildings and properties and adapt to our current mission and smaller workforce.

Milwaukee County has 1,000 properties totaling nearly fourteen million square feet. That might have been necessary years ago when we had nearly three times as many employees and provided more services but I think it's safe to say we don't need all of that space today.

In the coming years we will look to consolidate county buildings and facilities and improve the way we utilize the space we do need. Doing this will save us millions of dollars in maintenance, allow us to sell off unused and underused facilities, and increase our sustainability. Taking these steps could save taxpayers \$140 million in the first 20 years and \$250 million overall.

For too long Milwaukee County hasn't had a long-term, data-driven focus on its services and resources and that has to change.

Since I took office nearly two years ago, I've focused on making disciplined decisions focused on long-term outcomes and I will continue to do that.

I'm going to keep talking about and pushing for shared services across the county. We missed an opportunity this year when we didn't move forward with the City/County Parks Patrol Plan. The plan would have saved taxpayers one-and-a-half million dollars a year and it had the backing of all the mayors, village administrators and police chiefs in Milwaukee County.

Unfortunately politics got in the way of moving forward with this plan, but I want to let people know it's not going to stop me. Whether it's that plan or something else, I will continue to look for ways to be more efficient and effective.

Milwaukee County has a lot of success stories that don't get told enough and while I have a captive audience here let me highlight some of those.

We are moving closer to making the lakefront high-rise project a reality. This project will create more than four thousand jobs and millions of dollars in tax revenue. It will also transform our skyline and be another shining example of what Milwaukee County can be when we aim high.

The Milwaukee County Transit System continues to be a key to a thriving economy in the County. Every day buses bring thousands of people to and from work and school. Unfortunately, this system is facing a fiscal cliff of its own as a result of the transit cuts from the state. I've been working hard lobbying Governor Walker and lawmakers in Madison to restore the ten percent cut to transit funding we received two years ago. I am hopeful that our Governor and representatives in Madison recognize the many ripple effects of a healthy transit system.

Our bus fleet is also getting newer and more efficient; we are getting 55 new buses this year, something I know riders will appreciate. I've made a commitment to transit in Milwaukee County and people should know I will work hard to keep it running strong.

Speaking of transportation, our Airport is the envy of most of the country. Fares at Mitchell International are well below the national average, we have inexpensive and convenient parking and we offer flights that will get you anywhere. Airlines and airports across the country are seeing a huge change and cutback in service. We certainly have felt that here, but at a time of major transition, our airport still attracts about 7-and-a-half million passengers per year and has nonstop flights to 32 cities. On top of that good news, Southwest and Delta Airlines have made major commitments to Milwaukee – another sign that things are moving in the right direction.

Our Parks Department has an exciting year ahead of it. Thanks to my budget we are transforming a handful of parks in Milwaukee's central city while starting to finally tackle long deferred maintenance in a thoughtful manner. And we're partnering with other government entities in exciting ways to protect our parks and our environment.

The parks department will expand their popular beer garden program this year and I have no doubt they will continue to receive well-deserved awards.

The Milwaukee County Veterans Service Office, led by Jim Duff, continues to lead the way in supporting veterans. His job fairs for Vets are growing. Last year he put on an event that featured 40 businesses looking to hire veterans, next month he and his staff are putting on an event that will have more than 70 employers.

I'm happy to say that at that job fair, Jim Keegan, the head of our Parks Department has made a commitment to hire 100 veterans into seasonal positions for 2013.

I'm also excited today to announce some new and important additions to Milwaukee County Government. Today is the first day of work for our new Department of Administrative Services Director Don Tyler and our new Sustainability Director Gordie Bennett.

Don brings 35 years of private business experience to Milwaukee County, including as Vice President of Investment Products & Services with Northwestern Mutual and most recently as Interim President and Executive Director of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. I have no doubt that his extensive experience in strategic planning, management, budgeting finance and economic development will be an asset to Milwaukee County as we move towards a government we can all be proud of.

Gordie comes to us from the University of Tennessee, where he was the Sustainability Manager. While it may take some time for him to adjust to the cold weather I know he will jump in right away to further our environmental efforts. Welcome Gordie and Don.

Our information services department will be busy in 2013 and I know employees can't be happier. Milwaukee County is finally moving into the next decade, upgrading our old computers and software to Windows 7. This will be a two year process but once it's done we will be a more efficient and likely less frustrated group. I think we can all agree that is something to cheer about.

I still get asked quite a bit why I choose to run, even though it's a frequent question I love getting it because it allows me to talk about why I love Milwaukee County.

This is the best community in the world. We have thriving businesses, creative leaders, great Universities and the potential to be even better.

The last part is why I ran and why I get out of bed energized every morning. I see a future for Milwaukee County that is a leaner government. I see a future professional workforce that is the envy of not just other government agencies, but also the private sector. Most importantly, I see a Milwaukee County that focuses on offering critical services in a sustainable way.

We won't reach any of these goals easily and we won't do it overnight, but I won't slow down or stop trying until we get there.

Thank you.